

HB 5521

Statement in Opposition to Proposed Bill No. 5521:

An Act Requiring Licensure of Masters-Level Psychologists

My name is Madeleine Leveille. I hold a doctoral degree from an accredited program in counseling/clinical psychology from the Ohio State University and a specialist degree in school psychology from Southern Connecticut State University. I obtained my license as a psychologist in Connecticut in 1980. Currently, I have a private practice in psychology in Waterford, CT, teach psychology courses in the masters program at Southern Connecticut State University, and reside in Clinton, CT.

I believe that Proposed Bill No. 5521 to license masters-level psychologists is unnecessary, confusing and potentially harmful. In addition, this proposed bill is unsuitable of the State of Connecticut, who has a tradition of setting high standards for its professionals.

The proposed bill is not in keeping with Connecticut's high standards for mental health professionals. This proposed bill to license masters-level practitioners as psychologists is in direct opposition to the high standards for psychologists that have been set by the American Psychological Association. The American Psychological Association (APA) is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States. APA is to psychologists as the American Medical Association (AMA) is to medical doctors. In 2010, APA developed a **Model Act for State Licensure of Psychologists**, intended to help states when drafting legislation regulating the practice of psychology. This APA Model Act regarding licensure recognizes the doctorate as the minimum educational requirement for entry into professional practice as a psychologist. If the proposed bill regarding licensing masters-level psychologists were to be enacted, it would set a bad precedent. It would lower the standards to become licensed as a psychologist in Connecticut. It would raise questions as to why Connecticut must resort to lowering its standards.

According to the Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards (ASPPB), of the fifty states and the District of Columbia, 33 have established the doctoral degree as the minimum standard for licensure as a psychologist. Of the remaining states, 16 have two or more categories of licensure. In these 16 states, individuals who hold doctoral degrees may be licensed as psychologists, and those with masters degrees have a different license. The licenses of those who hold masters degrees clearly identify these individuals as belonging to a different group than those who have earned doctoral degrees. Some states identify the masters group as

Psychological Examiners; others call these individuals Psychological Associates, and still others call them Psychological Technicians. None of these sixteen states identifies this group as masters-level psychologists. The two remaining states, West Virginia and Vermont, specify the masters degree as the minimum educational credential for licensure as a psychologist. The licensure laws in West Virginia and Vermont are not new laws; they have been in place for years. For Connecticut to license masters level persons as psychologists now would be turning back the clock, not moving forward to increasing standards.

Of the governing entities from the District of Columbia to the greater Boston corridor, which includes the District of Columbia, Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and New Hampshire, all require a doctoral degree for licensure as a psychologist. If we use bases of comparison other than propinquity, we find the similar results. Specifically, most of the states that are closest to Connecticut on any given important variable such as median income and educational attainment use the doctoral degree as the minimum standard for licensure as a psychologist.

Licensing masters level graduates as psychologists in Connecticut would be confusing to the general public. The general public are not likely to understand that individuals who have a masters degree and are licensed as psychologists would have substantially less training than licensed psychologists who hold doctoral degrees in psychology. Individuals who complete masters programs in psychology have far fewer courses in psychology than doctorally trained psychologists. The coursework in masters programs lacks the depth and breadth of coursework in doctoral programs. In addition, masters level individuals do not have the number of supervised hours in practica and internships that individuals who have earned doctoral degrees have. The American Psychology Association accredits doctoral programs in psychology; it does not accredit masters programs in psychology.

Proponents of this proposed bill to license masters level individuals as psychologists might highlight that other states license masters level individuals as psychologists. But, as I noted earlier, the preponderance of states that provide licenses to masters level people do so by clearly distinguishing that the masters group is less trained than the doctoral group. They often require that individuals whose degree and training are less than the doctoral level be supervised by fully licensed psychologists, that is, psychologists who have doctoral degrees in psychology. Proponents of Bill No. 5521 might argue that the bill does make a distinction between masters-level psychologist and psychologist. However, this distinction is subtle and likely to be ignored or misunderstood. It will be all too easy for the general public to perceive the masters-level psychologists as simply psychologists.

Proponents of this bill to license masters-level psychologists might argue that Connecticut already recognizes different types of psychologists. It is true that existing law regarding the licensure of psychologists in Connecticut recognizes a group of professionals who usually do not have doctoral degrees. This group is school psychologists. The existing legislation notes that school psychologists under

their certification by the Connecticut State Department of Education (SDE) may offer circumscribed mental health services to the public outside of school settings. The law, however, does not license school psychologists as psychologists. It does not license them, but merely recognizes their certification and grants them permission for a circumscribed educationally related practice. Connecticut's existing licensing law for psychologists is in keeping with the Model Act promoted by the American Psychological Association. The proposed bill regarding licensing is not in keeping with the Model Act by the largest, most established and recognized association of psychologists in the United States.

A rationale for the proposed Bill No. 5521 regarding licensing masters level personnel as psychologists is the pressing need for mental health providers in Connecticut, and especially mental health providers who work with under-served populations. That rationale may apply in many states, but not in Connecticut. The two states that license masters level individuals as psychologists and the 16 that license them as psychological examiners, associates or technicians are states in which their population is more rural and widely dispersed than is Connecticut's population. Connecticut, on the other hand, is compact, and it is rich in mental health resources. According to the Health and Resources Administration of the US Department of Health and Human Services, Connecticut does not have shortage of mental health professionals.

Who are the licensed mental health professionals in Connecticut? They are psychiatrists, psychologists, licensed clinical social workers (LCSWs), marriage and family therapists (MFTs), advanced practice nurses (APRNs), alcohol and drug abuse counselors, and licensed professional counselors (LPCs). (Let me clarify that the minimal education for licensure for both the masters level social worker and the LCSW is a masters degree.) The following table lists the number of licensed mental health providers by discipline in Connecticut.

License Type	Number of Licensed as of 12/31/2014
Advanced Practice Nurses (APRN)	4279
Certified Alcohol And Drug Abuse Counselors	254
Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW)	6,147
Licensed Professional Counselors (LPC)	2236
Marriage And Family Therapists (MFT)	1,208
Psychiatrists	2013*
Psychologists	1984
<i>Total</i>	<i>16,108</i>

*Statistic as of May 2013 provided by US Bureau of Labor Statistics (<http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes291066.htm#stas>). All other data provided by Connecticut Department of Public Health.

With more than 16,000 mental health professionals serving a state of roughly 3.6 million people, that there is not a dearth of mental health providers in Connecticut. There is approximately one licensed mental health professional for 223 people. Connecticut has more professionals who provide mental health services than this table indicates. This table only includes mental health professionals licensed by the State of Connecticut's Department of Public Health. It does not include school psychologists, who are certified by the State Department of Education, or pastoral counselors or clergy, for example. Connecticut, indeed, is fortunate to have such a large number of mental health professionals to serve its residents.

There are other arguments proponents of the proposed bill could muster. Let me address these arguments one by one. Proponents might argue that allowing another group of masters level professional would provide needed services to the less affluent. However, there are almost 13,000 individuals who are providing licensed mental health services at the non-doctoral (non-MD and non-Ph.D or Psy.D.) in Connecticut. The fees for these non-doctoral mental health providers are already lower than their more extensively trained doctoral colleagues.

Proponent might argue that it is unfair that individuals who have pursued advanced education beyond the bachelor's degree by earning a masters degree in psychology are not eligible for licensure. Although the current law does not permit individuals who have masters degrees in psychology to be licensed as psychologists, these master degree professionals have opportunities under existing licensure laws to become licensed in the mental health field. These individuals are eligible for licensure in Connecticut as licensed professional counselors (LPCs). By obtaining licensure as an LPC, these individuals can gain the recognition, privilege and responsibility of professional licensure in mental health services. And, they do so in a way that does not confuse or misinform the public, which is what the proposed bill would certainly do.

The proponents of the licensure bill for masters level psychologists might argue that the masters programs in psychology in the State of Connecticut have led them to believe that they would be licensable as psychologists after graduation. A review of the literature of the masters programs at UCONN, University of Hartford, Quinnipiac University, and the state universities recognize that licensure as a psychologist requires a doctoral degree and its associated training. These programs hold to the standards of the American Psychological Association. They fully advise their masters level students about the licensure and certification for which they are qualified and appropriately trained. Those interested in mental health are advised to pursue the LPC credential.

The proposed bill for the licensing of masters-level psychologists is virtually identical to licensing laws developed by a small, non-accredited organization that calls itself, Northamerican Association of Masters in Psychology (NAMP). NAMP is a non-profit organization founded about 20 years ago in Oklahoma. It is not connected with the American Psychological Association. According to its website, NAMP has less than 1,200 members with only nine from Connecticut. To pass this NAMP-like bill to license masters level psychologists is akin to making a law that authorizes physician assistants to call themselves medical doctors. I urge you to keep Connecticut's high standards high.

Thank you.

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